

ISSUE 77

SUMMER/FALL

PROTECT IMPROVE LEAD INSPIRE



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Greg Yankee

When looking at my note for the last newsletter, it is difficult not to be filled with a mixture of sadness and gratitude. Sadness at all of the optimism looking ahead at the spring and summer plans for 2020! Talk of Earth Day celebrations, large group volunteer opportunities, trainings at the library and so many other things that staff spent all winter planning and that would not have been possible without our donors' support. Perhaps sadness is not the right word though, because that second emotion – gratitude – quickly comes when looking at what has been included in this newsletter and knowing all that could not fit. How our staff, board, and community continue to respond not just to the impacts of COVID-19 but also the May flood fills with me gratitude.

In these pages, you'll read about our continued efforts at protecting and improving the natural environments of the Tittabawassee River watershed. Our core mission of permanent land conservation continues with partners throughout the region. Our work to connect people to nature and inspire the development of both individual and community-wide connections to our land and water continues. The early stages of the pandemic saw a surge of preserve users as people sought safe ways to maintain physical, emotional, and mental health in these uncertain times. Our belief is that if just one of those new visitors continues to enjoy our preserves and gets engaged with the meaningful work you all make possible, then we have no reason to be sad at what could have been.

As always, thank you for your support of our work!

PRESERVATION FOR OUTDOOR LEARNING

Over the summer, Little Forks accepted a 7-acre property in Homer Township near the Chippewa River that will become the conservancy's 7th nature preserve! Donated by the Anderson Living Trust with the request to see it, "preserved for the education and enjoyment for the people of the Midland area," is within close proximity to the Homer Township Park and the Chippewa Nature Center's Arbury Property. Management objectives for this property are being developed, but options include an outdoor learning space for our Nature/Nurture program as well as a small park area for community enjoyment.



CONSERVATION ALONG THE CEDAR RIVER

In April, the Little Forks Conservancy accepted a 26-acre conservation easement protecting 1,250 feet of frontage on the West branch of the Cedar River. Donated by the Leon P. Martuch Chapter of Trout Unlimited (LPMTU) and located in Hamilton Township of Clare County, the property is surrounded by forestland, features natural wetlands, open fields, and is predominantly undeveloped with a small picnic area.

The property was purchased by LPMTU in 1980 and dedicated to Leon P. Martuch, the founder of Scientific Anglers and a pivotal early member of Trout Unlimited. The Little Forks Conservancy also has history with the property including enrollment in the Sustainable Lands Program in 2012 and ties into the conservancy's Protecting Land Preserving Water Quality project -- through The Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) -- as an effort permanently protect lands located in the Cedar River Watershed. The property has also been used as one of the sites of Little Forks' biannual Cedar River Stream Monitoring Program and is adjacent to another conservation easement held by the conservancy.



CELEBRATING 20 YEARS

This past June marked 20 years at Little Forks for our Director of Land Conservation, Elan! Working to protect and improve mid-Michigan's natural environments for two decades is no easy feat but what he's accomplished in that time speaks volumes to his passion for his career. Since Elan's first year on the job he has assisted with the protection of 34 conservation easements and 6 preserves -- totaling nearly 4,000 acres of land, 19 miles of shoreline, and 10 miles of trails.

When Elan was interviewed back in 2000, he was asked to share his thoughts to the following questions.

Q: Why do you want to work for the Little Forks Conservancy?

A: "It is not often in life that one has a chance to have a direct impact upon their surroundings. Working for the Little Forks Conservancy can allow me the opportunity to have a significant role in preserving the natural environment for future generations to come. Aside from the satisfaction of working to preserve nature, I enjoy working outdoors and meeting various people with diverse interests and backgrounds."

Q: Why do you think an organization like the Little Forks Conservancy is important to the community?

A: "Organizations like the Little Forks Conservancy have the ability to bring people together to work towards preserving the environment. Local cleanups and working with volunteers on land management projects can help to strengthen the bonds between community members. Community members can learn that they can make a difference in their own backyards with beneficial impacts on the environment."

Elan's continued dedication to his work and the outdoors is profoundly admirable and appreciated by all who have the privilege to work alongside him. To put it simply in a remark Elan stated years ago, "The most important thing is to love what you do and look forward to going to your next day's work."

The board and staff at Little Forks Conservancy applauds Elan for 20 years of doing what he loves, and being the unofficial historian of Little Forks, as well as a colleague and friend.



OUTDOORS TOGETHER HIKES

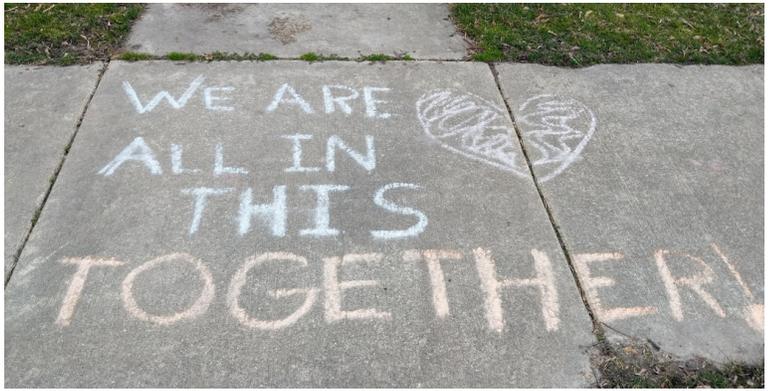
Our Director of Programs and Partnerships will host another series of hikes for LGBTQIA+ individuals and allies this fall! The OUTdoors Together hikes will include a few health and safety restrictions including limiting each hike to 15 individuals and the requirement of face coverings during each event.

The hikes will be hosted on a number of trails ranging in effort levels and lengths. Due to the limitation on attendees, registration is required. Visit bitly.com/OTHikes for

information on rules and regulations, dates, locations and to register! These hikes are free of charge and allows Little Forks to continue their mission of providing accessible outdoor recreation to ALL members of our community.

If there are questions regarding safety, location, terrain, accessibility, or to register if the online option isn't available to you, please email Andrea at afoster@littleforks.org





IN THIS TOGETHER

COVID-19 threw us all for an unexpected loop and adapting to whatever constitutes normal amidst a global pandemic has been difficult for everyone. But in times of uncertainty we all do our part to embrace these changes together. We've rallied together to support local businesses and non profits, conducted meetings by phone or video, and kept our distance to protect ourselves and others. But months of staying home can wear on a community prompting us all to locate safe avenues to escape to.

A recent study from the Outdoor Industry Association reported that Americans are going outdoors in nature more than ever, and the Little Forks Conservancy couldn't agree more with these findings. During the months of the Stay Home order, three of our preserves saw huge spikes in activity compared to years prior - many visitors we suspect who weren't aware these local spaces were right in their backyards. In times of social-distancing and cancelled events, our outdoor environments shined through as a place for solace and adventure - reaffirming the necessity to protect these spaces.

With more foot traffic on the trails at all levels -- locally, state-wide, and nationally -- overcrowding and misuse of our outdoor spaces increased. This prompted the launch of a national Recreate Responsibly coalition to educate newcomers and seasoned outdoorists on proper use and safety of our outdoors. Little Forks joined the movement to encourage outdoor users to know before you go, plan ahead, practice physical distancing, play it safe, stay close to home, leave no trace, and build an inclusive outdoors. These guidelines provided a starting point for everyone to keep each other and our outdoors safe. Learn more at recreateresponsibly.org.

As the writing on the sidewalk suggests, we are in this together, and our perseverance wouldn't be possible without the outpouring of support from our community, state, and nation. We are humbled by our community members as we support one another and find new places to explore while continuing to navigate through COVID together.

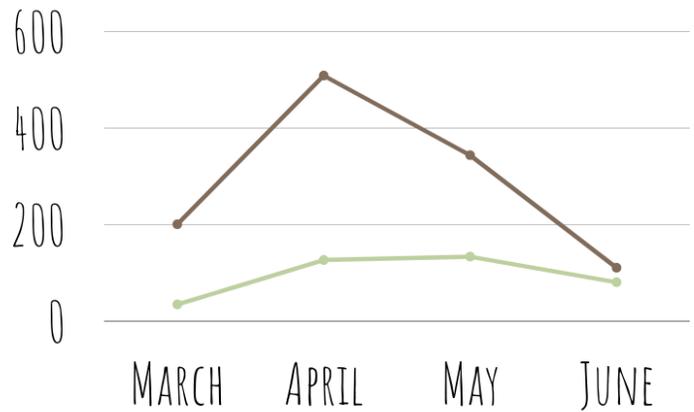
PRESERVE TRAFFIC

2019 2020

AVERILL



FORESTVIEW



RIVERVIEW





Drone Footage Courtesy of Ben Tierney

FLOOD IMPACT & REBUILD

It's undeniably been a rough year, and like so many of our community members, Little Forks Conservancy experienced considerable damage to our office and preserves after the Edenville Dam collapse. The entire basement, where half of our staff members had individual offices, stewardship supplies, programming materials, our student gear locker, waders, snowshoes, binoculars, main printer, and much much more, was under three feet of contaminated water. An emergency restoration crew assessed the damage, salvaging some items, but ultimately required a complete gutting of three offices, two bathrooms, and several storage rooms. While we figure out the options that make the most sense for the organization, staff can still be reached by email as they work outdoors, from their homes, and from co-working space in the region. Post street will remain our mailing address for now.

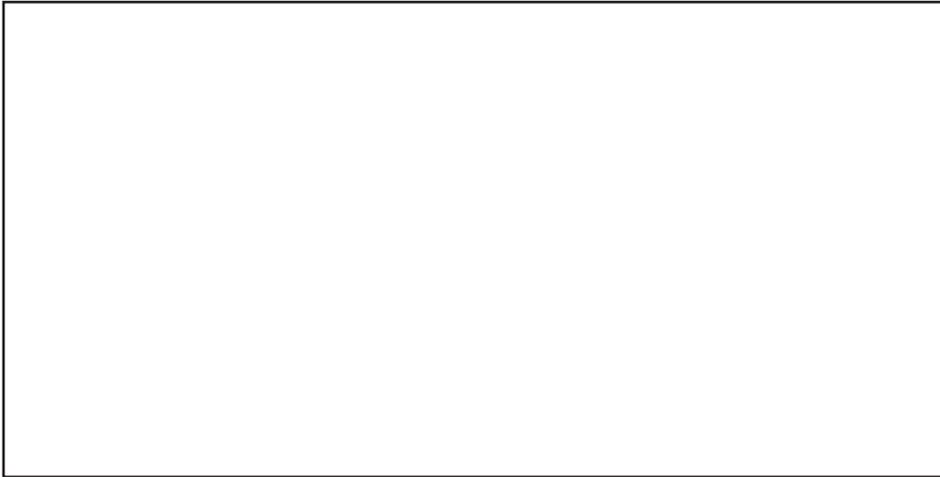
The damage to our preserves resulted in closing off portions of trails that were unsafe to traverse. Forestview Natural Area has remained completely closed due to down trees and moved/uneven bridges. The rustic trail at Averill Preserve also closed briefly due to excess debris and downed trees obstructing the trail. Staff continue to steadily work towards cataloging the damage and repairs needed for our preserves and have a great deal of work ahead of us.

Thankfully, we aren't in this alone. We have received countless messages from our community members, friends throughout the state, and even organizations from other states offering assistance, notes of encouragement, and donations to help us rebuild. We thank each and every one of you who reached out during this time of need. As we move forward, it's our hope that you will continue to visit our preserves while practicing all recommended safety procedures. It is also our hope that you take every opportunity this season to appreciate the beauty that Michigan provides year-round.





THE LITTLE FORKS CONSERVANCY
105 POST STREET
MIDLAND, MI 48640



The Little Forks Conservancy permanently protects and improves natural environments in mid-Michigan by leading and inspiring actions that conserve vital habitats and waterways for the benefit of our entire community.

Since 1996, we've protected over 3,966 acres of land, 19 miles of shoreline, and 10 miles of trails.

We strive to have places in nature that inspire connections and communities, serve as a healing and educational space, and allow all ages and abilities access to nature - now and for future generations to come.

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